

The Professional Marine Communicator

DEDICATED TO THOSE WHO HAVE GIVEN THEIR LIVES TO MARINE COMMUNICATIONS

Editor & Publisher: David J. Ring, Jr., 65 Heywood Avenue, Melrose, MA 02176 Telephone: (617) 665-4784
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ITU says: Radio Officers STAY!

(GENEVA, SWITZERLAND) On Thursday night, October 14th shortly before midnight, the final vote on three proposals to determine the fate of world wide maritime Radio Officers and Radio Electronics Officers resulted in a decisive victory for safety of life at sea on large ocean-going vessels.

A Norwegian proposal that would have allowed governments to determine how to accomplish maintenance of equipment in the future global maritime distress and safety system was defeated in a secret balloting procedure at the International Telecommunications Union, (ITU), in Geneva by 57 to 21.

A second proposal submitted by the Federal Republic of Germany was also defeated by a vote of 42 to 35. The West German proposal called for a general type of operating certificate and a minor technical certificate. The German proposal was opposed by the International Transportworkers' Federation, (ITF), observers and more than 55 administrations represented at the Mobile World Administrative Radio Conference for 1987.

The final vote of 55 to 22 came on a proposal coordinated by Greece and cosponsored by some 35 nations and more than 30 other government supporters. The proposal called for the carriage of a Radio Officer with a first or second-class Radio Electronic Operator Certificate on vessels of 1,000 gross tons or more sailing beyond the range of medium frequency radio, generally accepted as about 200 miles offshore.

The major proponents for the "flexible" approach to Radio Officer carriage consisted of the Scandinavian countries, Western Europe, the U.K., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S. agencies that have been working on the semi-automated high-tech Future Global Maritime Distress and Signaling System (FGMDSS) for years and assuming that part of the selling package would be the elimination of the Radio Officer position. The U.S. Coast Guard and the Federal Communications Commission are hardest hit by the 2 to 1 defeat of their pet project in maritime affairs for almost ten years.

ITF observers at the Geneva meeting see the vote as vindication of their long-held position that Safety of Life at Sea can only be assured with a dedicated Radio Officer position and on-board maintenance of equipment, particularly in a new and untested system. The ITF observer delegates were Mr. Kevin Murphy of the U.K., Mr. Don Dishinger of the Radio Officers Union, USA, Mr. Harvey Strichartz, American Radio Association, Mr. J. Hassler of West Germany and Mr. Juvenil Guazn of the Argentine Radio Officers Union.

This vote indicates the ITU's belief that the positions of Operator, and Maintainer shall remain united in the position of "Radioelectronic Officer".

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MCI signs P&S for RCA Globecom; Layoffs at WCC & KPH

According to Mr. William Ferris, Manager of RCA Globecom's Chatham Radio/WCC, General Electric, owner of RCA, signed a Purchase and Sale agreement on 29 October 1987. Mr. Ferris also said that the union contracts for the SITOR and Morse operators will remain in effect for the future owners, MCI.

Since RCA sold its ship accounting business to Radio Holland-USA a few months ago, the situation at RCA's coast stations both on the East coast and on the Pacific coast has changed drastically: Cut-backs of personnel on Morse and SITOR Teleprinter, and decreased traffic totals. One operator at RCA's San Francisco Radio/KPH told PROCOMM that the manpower shortage due to layoffs is so critical that many ships aren't sending their traffic through RCA's circuits because of delays caused by not having enough operators available to answer the ships and take their traffic.

Gone from WCC are telegraphers Bill Siebert, Mike Dunbar, Bill Lorain and Luck Hurder.

On the other side of the USA recent departures from San Francisco Radio/KPH include Morse Operators Mrs. Denise Stoops, and Mr. Maloney.

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R/O's stay

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The Certificates which will be issued in the future will be "First-class Radioelectronic Operator", which will certify component level electronics proficiency and "Second-class Radioelectronic Operator", which certifies system level knowledge of the operator. A "Restricted Operator" certificate will also be available for vessels of under 1000 tons.

Although the start of FGMDSS is scheduled for 1991, some Administrations plan to delay that date at IMO. Observers believe that one can expect to see slippage from the 1997 final implementation date by about five years.

The USA delegation (FCC) officially registered "Reservations" to the vote to combine the maintenance and operator functions and retain the Radio Officer. According to one FCC source, PROCOMM learned that "We were not happy with the outcome." Implementation of the FGMDSS and the removal of the Radio Officer has been on the "hidden agenda" of the FCC and US Coast Guard for years.

Other developments at Geneva include the narrowing of the marine radio bands and reallocation of Morse and Sitor frequencies, sometimes mixing both modes within the same subband, narrowing the HF radio channel widths, and the preservation of the guard band around the MF Radiotelegraph Distress frequency (500 kHz). Also a resolution was adopted which "encourages" administrations to retain the current Distress System until full implementation of FGMDSS.

FLASH!

According to PROCOMM's source at EXXON Shipping Corp., EXXON is meeting during the week of November 8, 1987 to discuss removing the R/O's on eight of their ships on the Panama to Valdez, Alaska run.

Our source says that EXXON is confident that it can remove the Radio Officers on this run at this time.

RCA Globcom

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According to PROCOMM's West Coast sources, KPH is down to one telex/SITOR operator and two Morse Operator in the evening. Our sources also told us that the two new SITOR operators that RCA juggled from other layoffs in its international telex network office in San Francisco do not have their FCC licenses, and that KPH is considering "turning off the Transmitters" during the mid-watch. If KPH does this, it will leave ITT's San Francisco Radio/KFS as the only commercial West Coast station guarding the bands at night.

In a parallel development, the FCC has approved the merger of ITT World Communications and Western Union (WUD). The merger which includes SAN FRANCISCO RADIO/KFS only needs approval from WUD stockholders.

U.S. Re-Flagged tanker blasted by missile

According to Radio Officer William Kreysler, the missile that hit the SEA ISLE CITY just off Kuwait, hit like a hundred-thousand ton hammer. Kreysler, 72, who is from San Diego said "We think it was a Silkworm anti-ship missile."

The missile hit the deckhouse and shattered the bridge. The American captain, John Hunt, from Tampa, FL. (He used to sail on the SS KING and the SS OVERSEAS ALASKA - Ed.) was badly injured. Kreysler first saw Capt. Hunt lying in a pool of blood. "He couldn't see," said Kreysler, "everyone else on the bridge was badly wounded."

According to Kreysler, about half of the tanker's 38 man crew was hurt, ten of them seriously.

Mr. Kreysler said that he was able to get off a distress call from his damaged Radio Room and that a Kuwaiti navy cutter appeared shortly thereafter.

The SEA ISLE CITY was on her way to an oil depot to load when she was hit by the missile.

MEBA D-2's Vice President Jerome Joseph proposes manning ships without Radio Officers

At Kings Point on September 17-18 1987, MEBA District-2 Vice President Jerome Joseph presented a plan to reduce crewing costs to a group including shipowners and other maritime interests.

The sleek crew proposed by Mr. Joseph for new U.S. Flagged ships would consist of 13 men:

Master
Chief Engineer
3 Assistant Officers
8 General Purpose crewmembers

There would be no Radio Officer onboard. The Radio Officer's duties would be presumably be taken over by the other crewmembers.

The Assistant Officers would all hold dual licenses as Engineers and Deck Officers. The General Purpose Crewmembers would work on Deck or in the Engine Room wherever they were needed. Three of these crewmembers would be permanently assigned to the Steward's Department.

In his remarks, Mr. Joseph said "...I firmly believe that labor's role in determining the size of the crew should be virtually nonexistent, ..."

Mr. Joseph has stated in the past that the official position of MEBA D-2 was against government or union mandated crewing and safety standards

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and that the shipping companies should themselves determine what is, or is not needed. D-2 is the union which at one time represented Radio Officers on such ships as the SS OCEANIC INDEPENDANCE and the SS OCEANIC CONSTITUTION (the only two U.S. passenger ships), the SS GREAT LAND and the SS WESTWARD VENTURE (the Tacoma, Washington to Anchorage, Alaska RO/RO's), the MV BRAUADO (a U.S. Flag tanker which runs between South Korea and Japan) all of which are ships on which historic precedents have been set by allowing them to run without Radio Officers. All these precedents seriously affect the security of our sea-going jobs as Radio Officers.

The latest move of allowing the SS WESTWARD VENTURE and the SS GREAT LAND to sail on an international voyage without a Radio Officer will seriously affect the Alaska to Panama trade which accounts for many jobs especially with the independent oil companies, some of which have been looking forward to the time where they could dispense with their Radio Officers.

The MV BRAUADO [an irritatingly fitting name - Ed.] was the first ship on an international voyage to sail without a Radio Officer.

The two passenger ships, according to PROCOMM's sources, were granted an exemption from the local Honolulu, Hawaii FCC office instead of going to FCC's Aviation and Marine Department in Washington, DC. According to our sources, the exemption was granted under the provision that the ships have continuous coverage on either 2182 kHz or UHF Channel 16. Our sources say they have on several times tried to contact the USCG while the ships were on their inter-island voyage, and were unable to communicate with them on 2182 kHz or UHF channel 16, however, while these ships carried Radio Officers, continuous communications coverage with USCG COMMSTA HONOLULU/NMO was available on 500 kHz.

D2 R/O cries:

"I've been shanghaied!"

According to Mr. Jay Carr, Radio Officer on the MV AMERICAN FALCON/KMJA, a Crowley ship manned by the SMU, MEBA District 2 is "trying to beat me around." Mr. Carr says that he got a call a month and a half ago on Saturday afternoon around 1:30 P.M. from Mr. William "Bill" Powers begging him to take a ship that was waiting at the dock in Bayonne, NJ. Mr. Carr did in his words "a red-eye" flying all night to meet the ship in Bayonne, NJ.

When he was asked to sign up on the foreign articles, Mr. Carr found that the ship wasn't a D-2 ship. In fact, it was a Crowley Maritime ship under the Seafarers Maritime Union (SMU). "I was shanghaied," says Mr. Carr, "I was lead to believe that it was a District 2 ship. I called Bill Powers the next morning at 0800, and spoke to him. He said that I'd get my pension credits: 'No problem, whatever you want I'll

WMH petitions to close

The Maryland Department of Transportation, has petitioned the FCC to close BALTIMORE RADIO/WMH effective February 1, 1988. Deadline for comments is December 1, 1987. Sent comments to Federal Communications Commission, 1919 M Street, N.W., Washington, DC WMH provides mariners with twice daily weather bulletins. If WMH closes, it will reduce the Radiotelegraph Safety Network. Because US Coast Guard watchkeeping seldom matches the quality of commercial station watchkeeping, many Radio Officers are quite concerned. Says one Radio Officer who declined to identify himself: "I've worked at commercial coast stations, and there are many times that ships, even USCG cutters call the US Coast Guard on 500 kHz for sometimes hours. I thought, perhaps it was just because they put the Radioman Recruits on the Distress Circuit to get experience, but they are just so poor compared to the commercial operators. One day when I called the telex number for U.S. Coast Guard Rescue Co-ordination Center (RCC), I was horrified to learn that the telex operator could only type five words per minute."

Our Radio Officer source goes on: "If the United States abandons Morse telegraphy it will make a serious error. The Soviet Union is adding more and more Morse operators. They have also demonstrated their ability to bombard our commercial and military satellites with large amounts of random radio signals which desense the satellite, and make it useless for communications. The Soviet Union can communicate on Morse at their normal speeds of 45 to 60 words per minute. It's going to be a tragedy, and I'm sure it's going to happen and we're going to be unprepared for it. We need WMH, we need Commercial-quality morse operators

get it for you, we're really up against the wall with this one, and I'll take care of you Powers told me."

Mr. Carr, who is 65 years old and only needs a few weeks of employment time to get ten year's of pension credit to vest his pension and be eligible for retirement, sailed the ship to Europe.

Mr. Carr said that the trip was uneventful, except that the captain went into the radio room and sent telexes and made phone calls while he was off watch.

Mr. Carr told PROCOMM: "When we were returning to the USA, the captain of the MV AMERICAN FALCON begged me to stay on the ship while it went coastwise, as the last time they went coastwise around the USA, they had no radio officer onboard."

"On the return trip, about two or three days out from Bayonne, (when I had 25 days employment)," Mr. Carr goes on, "I saw a copy of a contract between SMU and Crowley Maritime. It said that after 31 days of service on a SMU ship, all employees automatically and irrevocably become members of the SMU and their former association with MEBA District 2-AMO is terminated."

"When I saw that I was really angry," says Radio Officer Carr.

Mr. Carr told PROCOMM that he terminated his employment upon arrival to the USA, and returned to his home. He contacted Mr. Powers from MEBA D-2 by telephone and according to Mr. Carr, "[Mr.] Powers reneged on his promise. If the SMU time doesn't count, I'll be furious. I took that job to complete my ten years of vesting so I could retire. Now it seems that D-2 is playing with me, and I'm getting angry."